

GLOBAL ISSUES:

FREEDOM AT HOME, FREEDOM ABROAD:

Communities of Color Protesting Vietnam, 1965-1975



OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the anti-Vietnam war movement and its intersections with the black freedom struggle and the Asian American movement by investigating primary sources to uncover these diverse perspectives.

STUDENT GOALS

- Students will be able to contextualize the Vietnam War as a long war for the Vietnamese, situating it within an extended struggle for independence and national autonomy.
- Students will learn about how the Vietnam War helped to catalyze Asian American identity formation. They will examine the role of key activists like Yuri Kochiyama, exploring her political perspective in a number of movements. They will also learn about the experiences of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees who resettled in cities like New York after being displaced by the Vietnam War.
- Students will make connections between the American antiwar movement and the black freedom struggle by understanding the uneven effects of conscription, which disproportionately drafted African American men during the Vietnam War.
- Students will examine Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s role as an antiwar activist, linking his antiwar efforts to his vision for civil rights.
- Drawing lessons from the lives of Yuri Kochiyama and Dr. King, students will identify the intersectional lives of activists and their role in multiple struggles.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.2

Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
(Grade 5)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
(Grades 6-8)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.
(Grades 11-12)



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KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Antiwar movement
- Asian American movement
- Black freedom struggle
- Cold War
- Colony
- Conscription
- Draft
- Indochina
- Intersections
- Pacifists
- Refugees
- Viet Minh and Viet Cong

ORGANIZATIONS

- Asian Americans for Action
- Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam

PEOPLE

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Malcolm X
- Yuri Kochiyama



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INTRODUCING RESOURCES:

On April 15, 1967, an estimated 400,000 protesters marched from Central Park to the United Nations to demand an end to U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, with Martin Luther King, Jr. leading the way. It was the largest antiwar demonstration in U.S. history to date. The march was planned by the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (“the Mobe”), a loose coalition spearheaded by 82-year-old New York peace activist A.J. Muste. The Mobe reflected alliances between the city’s longtime pacifists and a new generation of radical youth who sought to end the war and change the world.

New York was home to many of the nation’s key antiwar organizations, which attracted a diverse range of antiwar youth, artists, veterans, elected officials, and the middle class. But conflict over the war also increasingly divided the city, and in 1970, construction workers attacked antiwar protesters on Wall Street. In 1975, after more than 4,000 New Yorkers had died in Indochina, protesters gathered again in Central Park to commemorate the war’s end, but trauma and divisions from the Vietnam War remained.



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KEY EVENTS:

1954

- Vietnamese troops defeat French at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu
- U.S. sends first American soldiers the following year

1964

- After an alleged North Vietnamese attack on a U.S. vessel in the Gulf of Tonkin, Congress approves increased military involvement in Vietnam and the antiwar movement emerges in response

1967

- Martin Luther King, Jr. denounces the war at Riverside Church, and 11 days later returns for the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam

1968

- Tet Offensive, My Lai massacre in Vietnam
- President Lyndon Johnson declines to seek re-election
- Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy assassinated
- Youth protests occur around the world

1969

- Moratorium demonstrations take place in New York on October 15 and Washington, D.C. on November 15

1970

- "Hard Hat Riot" near Wall Street

1971

- *The New York Times* publishes the Pentagon Papers

1975

- Two years after the Paris Peace Accords ended direct U.S. involvement in the war, South Vietnam surrenders to North Vietnam, the last U.S. troops depart, and the country is formally unified
- "The War is Over!" celebration in Central Park



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INTRODUCING RESOURCE 1:**FLYER, "IS ANTI-ASIAN RACISM AN ISSUE," ca. 1970-2**

This flyer advertises a teach-in at Manhattan's United Christ Church, a key strategy activists used to protest the Vietnam War. The program included screenings of short films, a live performance (a "mixed media show"), and speakers, and was sponsored by the Asian Americans for Action (AAA) and the Asian Coalition.

The document begins with the question: "*Is Anti-Asian Racism an issue in the Indochina War?*" Asian American activist groups, like the sponsor Asian Americans for Action (formed in 1969), were influenced by the black freedom struggle and antiwar movements. The focus of the teach-in on anti-Asian racism in the context of foreign policy is important to note. The Vietnam War catalyzed the formation of a pan-Asian American identity and movement in the United States. Inspired by and working with activists in the black freedom struggle, Asian Americans connected the US government's intervention abroad with its policies regarding race at home. The news of President Nixon's secret bombings of Cambodia between 1969-1973 further galvanized Asian Americans into action. U.S. news stations broadcast the war's fatalities over national media as never before, showing violence against civilians as well as soldiers—and blurring the line between them. According to Vietnam's official estimates, there were approximately two million Vietnamese civilian casualties during the war. With the end of the war, many Southeast Asian refugees would resettle in urban centers like New York, creating new communities living through trauma and the legacies of war.

Referring to the war as the Indochina War, rather than the Vietnam War, is also significant. From the perspective of groups like AAA or Asian Coalition, the Vietnamese were fighting for the liberation of their country from foreign control. The use of the term "Indochina War" signals their stance against the war in the context of a long history of colonization in Southeast Asia. Indochina was a French colony that included present-day Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. In 1954, the Viet Minh, a Vietnamese nationalist coalition that adopted a communist ideology, defeated the French and declared victory from colonial rule. The following year, interpreting the conflict through the lens of the Cold War with the Soviet Union and citing a global threat of communism, the United States sent American soldiers to Vietnam to support the anti-communist government of Ngo Dinh Diem in what became South Vietnam. Vietnamese independence leader Ho Chi Minh, who had formed the Viet Minh, subsequently formed the Viet Cong to fight Diem and U.S. forces.

The question "*President Nixon says the war is winding down. Is it?*" not only reflects the teach-in's organizers' opposition to the war, but their position that the United States followed in the footsteps of the French and Chinese before them in sending military forces to occupy the region. The question also signals another turning point in the Vietnam War and antiwar organizing as Nixon invaded Cambodia in 1969, intensifying conflict despite his claims to deescalate troops. Many Asian American activists addressed racism in a global context, finding common experiences with people of color abroad as victims of U.S. militarism.



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“*See, hear, discuss*”– the actions that would take place at the teach-in – suggest the goals of the organizers to raise consciousness about the war in Vietnam. While the exact date of the document is unknown, we can infer that this event took place between 1970 and 1972 because one of the films screened was released in 1970. The second piece of evidence is that one of the sponsoring organizations – the Asian Coalition – disbanded in 1972.

The questions below are intended to guide student discussions and inquiry. As students examine the flyer’s bold and thought-provoking language used to advertise this teach-in, the historical context above will need to be interspersed to support student inquiry.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Examine the flyer. Break it into three parts.

1. Who are the activists who sponsored the event on this flyer?
2. When the activists posed the question, “Is Anti-Asian Racism an Issue in the Indochina War?,” what do you think they were suggesting? From their perspective, how are anti-Asian racism and the Vietnam War related?
3. Why might activists call this war the “Indochina War” instead of the Vietnam War?
4. What do you think the activists meant when they wrote: “President Nixon says the war is winding down, is it?” What do you think it would mean for a war to wind down?
5. In 1969, Americans began to hear about President Nixon’s secret bombings of Cambodia despite his claims to deescalate the war. Given this context, how does this change your understanding of the poster?
6. For the survivors of the Vietnam War, what does it mean for the war to end? What long-term impact would the war have had on refugees?
7. The group of activists who hosted this teach-in event advertised that participants will “see, hear, and discuss.” What specific activities were planned at this event? How is this a tactic of activism? Why would it be important to have an event like this?



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INTRODUCING RESOURCE 2:**FROM HARLEM WITH LOVE: A MURAL PROJECT FOR YURI & MALCOLM (2017)**

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the black freedom struggle and the antiwar movement spurred many Asian American activists to action. Some Asian American activists had experienced U.S. militarism first hand, influencing their analysis of the Vietnam War. For example, Yuri Kochiyama, a Harlem local and activist, had been held at an internment camp during World War II. Asian American activists found common ground with Vietnamese civilians who were also being perceived as enemies and affected by U.S. militarism and warfare.

“From Harlem with Love” – a mural painted by community activists and volunteers – is located a few blocks from where the Kochiyamas lived in the Manhattanville Houses in Harlem. Originally from California, Yuri Kochiyama was a Japanese American woman who moved to New York after World War II. She and her husband had been interned in Arkansas, among the many Japanese Americans who were held in internment camps during World War II. Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X met in 1963, remaining close throughout Malcolm X’s life. When Malcolm X traveled throughout Africa, he sent the Kochiyamas postcards from his travels. In 1965, Yuri Kochiyama sat in the first row at the Audubon Ballroom, for what would become Malcolm X’s final speech. When Malcolm X was fatally shot, Yuri Kochiyama rushed to his side and cradled his head. *Life* magazine captured this famous moment.

The power of place is important for yet another reason. The mural is on 545 Old Broadway, once home to a black-owned restaurant and nightclub called “Concerto West.” Yuri Kochiyama worked at the Concerto West for many years.



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From Harlem with Love: A Mural Project for Yuri & Malcolm, 2017, photo © Noah Lichtman/Columbia University

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

Take a close look at this Harlem mural, featuring Yuri Kochiyama on the left and Malcolm X depicted on the right.

1. What is happening in this mural?
2. Notice Malcolm X's words on the mural. He says, "The only way we'll get freedom for ourselves is to identify ourselves with every oppressed people in the world." What do you think he means?
3. Look closely at the people and texts in the mural. What are some connections that this mural is making? What visual symbols are used to make these connections?
4. Notice the mural was created in 2017. Why would the makers want to commemorate this bond between Malcolm X and Yuri Kochiyama in 2017? What else was happening that year?



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INTRODUCING RESOURCE 3:**PHOTOGRAPH OF HARLEM PEACE MARCH, 1967**

Black Americans also mobilized against the Vietnam War by connecting it with struggles for economic justice and racial equality. African Americans were more likely to serve in combat in Vietnam than white Americans: in 1967 over 64% of eligible African American men were drafted, as compared to 31% of white men. Antiwar activists of color emphasized that the war hurt their communities; they also argued that the war took away resources for education, employment, and other Great Society initiatives in New York.

The protesters in the photograph below marched with the Harlem contingent of the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam.

The Vietnam War was the first war after the integration of the armed services in the mid 1950s. Still, in reality, tensions among soldiers and discriminatory practices continued. Black soldiers often performed menial jobs, with little access to upward mobility. The draft affected working-class single men of color, in particular. Deferments were granted to men who had physical and mental health conditions, those who were married, with children, or attending college. New Yorkers of color often had fewer resources to help them avoid military service, such as college deferment or advocacy from a medical or mental health professional. Consequently, black Americans were disproportionately drafted and assigned to the front lines.



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Harlem Peace March (With Brownstones), Builder Levy, April 15, 1967, courtesy of the photographer

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is happening in this photograph? Where are these activists marching?
2. What do the posters say? What arguments are activists making in these statements on their posters: “Black Men Should Fight White Racism, Not Vietnamese Freedom Fighters?” or “Black People: 53% Dead, 2% of the Bread...Why?”
3. What connection are the activists making between race and conscription?



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INTRODUCING RESOURCE 4:**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AT RIVERSIDE CHURCH**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his watershed antiwar speech, “Beyond Vietnam,” at Riverside Church on Manhattan’s Upper West Side exactly one year before his death. King’s denunciation of “the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism” caused an immediate reaction. Many considered it his most powerful speech, while some civil rights leaders, President Johnson, and *The New York Times* vilified him. Here he is joined by, from left, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, historian Henry Steele Commager, and Union Theological Seminary President John Bennett.

Speaking as “a citizen of the world,” King argued that the war took away resources - and people - from the fight for racial equality and against poverty at home. This speech outlined the themes that would drive King during the final year of his life. In “Beyond Vietnam,” King laid out several reasons for opposing the Vietnam War, from specific ways that the war hurt African Americans and the poor, to the war’s laying bare the nation’s need for a broad “revolution in values.” He emphasized that his religious commitments demanded a commitment to peace, pointing out that his own civil rights work had always sought, broadly, to “save the soul of America.”

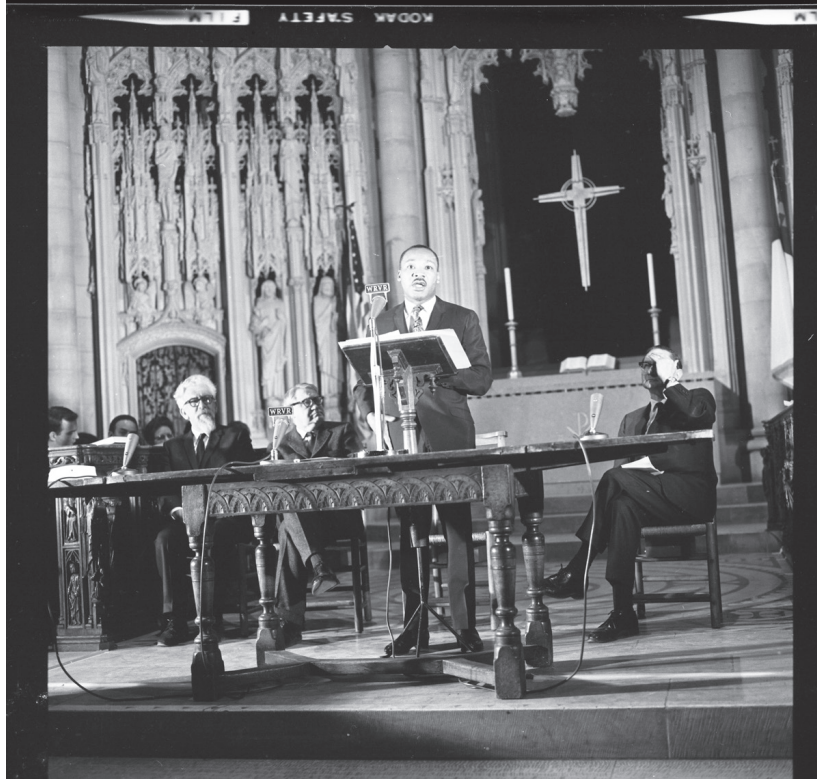
New York - the global city - was a fitting site for King’s increasingly vocal internationalist stance. Here he had visited the United Nations and met with world leaders to raise awareness for his racial justice campaigns. The city also served as a stopover for global travels and a connecting point to the rest of the world.

King returned to New York ten days after his antiwar speech at Riverside Church to join the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the first large-scale protest against the war. King led the march of Vietnam War protesters from Central Park to the United Nations, alongside Harry Belafonte, Monsignor Charles Owen Rice—a Pittsburgh priest known for his labor activism—and prominent pediatrician and peace activist Dr. Benjamin Spock. Estimates of the protest ranged from 125,000 to 500,000 people from New York and beyond, one of the largest mobilizations against the war.



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Martin Luther King at Riverside Church, John C. Goodwin, April 4, 1967, courtesy of the Estate of John C. Goodwin

Excerpt from “Beyond Vietnam” speech:

“We were taking the black young men...and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Riverside Church, 1967

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. Where, physically, is Dr. King in this photograph? Why would he choose to deliver this speech that challenged the war in a church?
2. Read the excerpt from Dr. King’s speech above. Why do you think Dr. King argued that the Vietnam War was a racist war?
3. Some other civil rights leaders criticized Dr. King for speaking out against the war. What reasons might they have given for preferring that he stay silent?



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ACTIVITY

In addition to speaking out against the Vietnam War, Yuri Kochiyama was an activist leader who participated in a number of struggles and movements.

Ask students to take a close look at the materials and audio-visuais on the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center's website: <http://smithsonianapa.org/yuri/>

The website introduces Yuri Kochiyama with the following quotation: "There is more to Yuri's life than Malcolm's death." This quotation refers to the moment when Malcolm X was fatally shot, and Yuri Kochiyama ran to the stage to cradle his head as he struggled to breathe. While this moment highlighted Yuri Kochiyama's proximity to Malcolm X, this website contains the works of artists who sought to commemorate Kochiyama's activism and legacy. For example, she had been involved with the fight for reparations for former internees and was a key leader in the Asian American community, in addition to contributing to a number of other social justice campaigns. The featured artists' contributions reveal the multidimensional and intersectional life of Yuri Kochiyama.

Have students describe some of Yuri Kochiyama's political perspectives, and ask: Why it is important to remember Kochiyama's multiple campaigns for justice?

Reflecting on the lives of Yuri Kochiyama and Dr. King, who were involved in multiple struggles with intersectional goals, ask students to participate in a design challenge identifying the issues that are important to them exploring the theme of intersectionality.

First they will identify which issues are important to them as a class and what type of social change they would like to see. Similar to the Harlem mural featuring Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X, they can consider the following:

- Which social issues do they want to represent in the mural? How might this mural represent their class?
- Is there a relationship between the issues that they chose to focus on? How might their mural celebrate the theme of intersectionality?
- Who will be depicted in the mural? Are there specific activists they would like to feature?
- Will the design include any words or phrases?
- What is the title of the mural?
- Where would this mural be seen?

Students can work on their mural designs in small groups and explain their designs to their classmates, or work as one large group and draft a statement of artistic purpose.



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SOURCES:

- Bui, Thi. *the Best We Could Do*. New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2017.
- Flyer, "IS ANTI-ASIAN RACISM AN ISSUE," ca. late 1960s-early 1970s. Courtesy of the Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University 2017.
- *From Harlem with Love: A Mural Project for Yuri & Malcolm*, (545 Old Broadway) 2017.
- Fujino, Diane C. *Heartbeat of Struggle: The Revolutionary Life of Yuri Kochiyama*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Goodwin, John C. *Martin Luther King, Jr. at Riverside Church*, April 4, 1967. Modern Print. Courtesy of the Estate of John C. Goodwin.
- Ishizuka, Karen L. *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties*. London: Verso Books, 2018.
- Lee, Erika. *The Making of Asian America: A History*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016.
- Levy, Builder. *Harlem Peace March (With Brownstones)*, April 15, 1967. Gold-toned gelatin silver print, 2001. Courtesy of the photographer.
- Louie, Steven G. and Glenn K. Omatsu, eds. *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2001.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Okihiro, Gary Y. *Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Tang, Eric. *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015.

ADDITIONAL READING:

- "The 30-Years War in Vietnam," February 7, 2017, describes the long history of the struggle for liberation in Vietnam.
www.nytimes.com/2017/02/07/opinion/the-30-years-war-in-vietnam.html
- "Black and White in Vietnam," July 18, 2017, illustrates the conditions of a racially-integrated American military during the Vietnam War.
www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/opinion/racism-vietnam-war.html
- "The Asian American Movement" entry in the Oxford Research Encyclopedias briefly tells the history of Asian American movement. See Historian Daryl Maeda's entry:
dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.21
- "A Brief History of the Art Collectives of NYC's Chinatown," February 7, 2017, reveals a history of Asian American activist-artists, as well as a mural they painted in the 1970s in Lower Manhattan.
hyperallergic.com/330442/a-brief-history-of-the-art-collectives-of-nycs-chinatown/

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS:

- "A Nation Challenged," November 4, 2001, describes a growing rift among Americans and their relationship to U.S. militarism abroad, specifically referring to the wars in the Middle East during the early 2000s.
www.nytimes.com/2001/11/04/world/nation-challenged-world-more-more-other-countries-see-war-solely-america-s.html
- "The racism that fuels the 'war on terror,'" March 25, 2013, connects the ways in which wars and racism are linked in the context of the War on Terror.
www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/25/racism-war-on-terror-awlaki